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Georges Chantraine, Henri de Lubac : les années de formation (1919–29)

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Henri de Lubac, tome II: Les années de formation (1919–1929) [Henri de Lubac, Volume 2: The Years of Formation, 1919–1929], Georges Chantraine, with preface by Emmanuel Tourpe, Études Lubaciennes 7, Paris: Cerf, 2009 (978-2-204-08589-8), 843 pp., pb € 56

This second of four projected tomes covers the main period of de Lubac's intellectual and spiritual formation as a Jesuit, from the aftermath of the First World War to the signing of the Lateran Treaty. It draws on extensive archival material, both de Lubac's private papers and material held in the Jesuit archive at Vanves in Paris. It will be an essential acquisition for any modern theology research library, adding superlatively to the meagre details available in *At the Service of the Church*, produced by de Lubac two years before his death in 1991.

The volume is significant not least because it sheds much light on the philosophy and theology de Lubac encountered in his early years. Having read Newman during his brief juvenat at St Mary's College, Canterbury, he was attuned to notions of spiritual change and dogmatic development. Philosophy came first, in accordance with the classic Jesuit progression. This included biology, mathematics and German, as well as metaphysics, epistemology, ontology, cosmology and psychology. The Maison Saint-Louis, the philosophate in St Helier on Jersey where de Lubac studied from 1920 to 1923, was cosmopolitan but nevertheless a scholastic desert. Presided over by Suárezian Pedro Descoqs and the more eclectic but equally mediocre Gabriel Picard, it gave him much to react against. During his residence, de Lubac nourished himself on Maine de Biran, warming to his subject-object synthesis, rehabilitation of the ontological argument, and situation of dogmatics within this relational context. He also read Blondel, especially *L'Action*. Chantraine argues convincingly that de Lubac's criticisms of philosophy are directed not so much at philosophy as a discipline as towards a received interpretation of what it entails—a view endorsed by Emmanuel Tourpe in his preface.

In September 1924, de Lubac arrived at Ore Place, the large theologate overlooking Hastings on the south coast of England. There, students were typically just as conservative as staff. He again pursued his own reading, owing partly to dizziness and headaches resulting from an ear injury sustained while fighting at Ville-sur-Tourbe in the Marne, which periodically restricted his activities.

Texts included Plotinus (in Émile Bréhier's new edition), whose pantheism and doctrine of recollection de Lubac saw as corrected by Augustine's 'twin beacons' of desire and revelation. Also traceable to this period is de Lubac's debt to Pascal's reunification of philosophy with theology via his two infinities (nature and God) and three orders (material, intellectual and spiritual).

In Jesuit theologates it was normal practice for informal academies to convene, led by a staff member and including a secretary and moderator (*protecteur*) from among its number. One of the Ore academies, formed in 1925 and meeting on Sunday mornings, was named 'La Pensée'. Topics for discussion included the *surnaturel*, continuing a trajectory obviously set by questions posed in Jersey by the mode of philosophy that had gained official endorsement. Within this academy, de Lubac conceived three key elements of what would later become his own distinctive thesis: the gratuity of creation and its elevation; pure nature as a secondary, derived concept; and the relative novelty of the presumption that nature and the supernatural are opposed.

In 1926, Fourvière reopened. This was a result of the continued thawing of relations with the secularist Third Republic and a weak franc. De Lubac relocated there with his confrères for his remaining two years' theology. Hastings had boasted high intellectual achievements and intense collegiality, but its isolated location had the effect of restricting exchanges with the wider Catholic world. Such exchanges now multiplied, although did not encompass non-compatriots. Chantraine examines in depth the 'Groupe Lubac' that formed at Fourvière and the thorny issues of its relationship with 'La Pensée' and subsequent impact. Reviewing evidence and various interpretations, he recognizes the clear differences of context just referred to, including the unofficial character of the 'Groupe Lubac'. At the same time, he rightly identifies the tremendous importance of its antecedents, providing a vital antidote to readings of the history of *nouvelle théologie* which see it as having emanated solely from Fourvière. These include several key figures of the previous generation: Léonce de Grandmaison, a dominating innovator until his death in 1927 but now largely forgotten, Pierre Rousselot (killed fighting in the First World War), Yves de Montcheuil (shot by the Gestapo), Pierre Charles and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. The 'Groupe Lubac' was permitted to continue, Chantraine suggests, partly because de Lubac was seen by some of his seniors as exercising a moderating

influence. Nevertheless, he was assigned to teach at the Catholic Theological Faculty in the city, not in the Jesuit theologate on the hill above. From this period date significant previously unpublished papers on miracles, redemption and merit.

De Lubac's efforts in these papers may be regarded as laying foundations for his view that the passive and active aspects of freedom are both vital in theology and spiritual life. Refusing to reduce the transcendent to spiritualist immanentism as had Bergson, but also critical of the subjective synthesis of reason and experience in the Kantianism of Maréchal, he was convinced that unification can only be effected by the action on nature of a finality both absolute and objective, that is, God. He sees the modern problem of establishing the unity of the subject as pre-Kantian, beginning with Spinoza, for whom questions surrounding the psychological unity of the person are inseparable from those regarding the existence and mutual relation of God and world. This leads him to defend the double gratuity of creation and redemption, in which the whole movement of grace and salvation is set within a relation of primordial harmony. This is no intellectual exercise of a kind abstracted from spiritual experience. In correspondence with friends that is also cited at length, de Lubac reflects profoundly on how his own physical infirmity drew him into deeper identification with the suffering and sacrifice of Christ.

David Grumett

University of Exeter

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